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ABSTRACT

To determine what might be done to improve "Insect Alerts," which is a newsletter that carries "information on insect biology, abundance, activity and interpretation of control need," put out through the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service 26 weeks a year, a survey was conducted. A mail questionnaire was sent to all 120 county extension directors and agricultural agents, and 175 were sent out to members of the Michigan Pesticide Association. In all, 200 of the 295 mailed out were returned. The questions concerned use of the information contained in the newsletter, opinion of the publication, changing to a monthly publication schedule, and distribution pattern. It was concluded from the survey that the publication is very favorably received; readers would like additional information on insect-related topics included; and there appeared to be a place for monthly publication. A copy of the survey instrument is provided. (DB)

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Reader Survey for INSECT ALERTS

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READER SURVEY FOR INSECT ALERTS

by
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INTRODUCTION

Insect Alerts is a 2-6-page mimeographed newsletter put out by the second author of this report through the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service. It's mailing list of about 1,000 includes all Michigan county extension directors and county agricultural agents, selected large growers, many state and federal personnel, and selected industry representatives.

The newsletter carries "information on insect biology, abundance, activity and interpretation of control need." It is published weekly 26 weeks a year (April through September) during the active insect seasons.

It's purpose is to provide a quick, up-to-date information source to Michigan professionals dealing educationally and commercially with insect control. Information for this newsletter is compiled from reports reaching the Extension Entomology Specialist the previous week from agents, specialists, and other contacts throughout the state. The compiling, mimeographing, and mailing all take place the same day--Friday of each week.

THE SURVEY

Although Insect Alerts generally has seemed to be a valuable

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Our thanks to Miss Karn Weirman for tabulating the data and for typing the manuscript.

and useful newsletter from the informal feedback received, the authors desired to get more extensive and detailed feedback from the newsletter's audiences to see what might be done to improve this service.

A mail questionnaire was sent out during August, 1972. Copies were sent to all 120 county extension directors and agricultural agents in the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service. In addition, 175 were sent out to members of the Michigan Pesticide Association--an organization made up of industry representatives and people from various chemical companies.

Returned were 111 questionnaires (93%) from Extension workers, and 89 questionnaires (51%) from the MPA members. Thus there were a total of 200 questionnaires returned (68%) out of the 295 mailed out.

Only one mailing was made. There was no attempt to increase the return by any follow-up procedure.

We wanted to find out some things about how these readers use the Insect Alerts information, what their reactions to the newsletter are, and how they would think we might improve it. We also wanted to check out the idea of publishing Insect Alerts all year round, but only monthly during the winter season.

USE OF INFORMATION

First, we asked about how readers were using the Insect Alerts information.

How do you use the Insect Alerts information? (Respondents could indicate more than one use.)

Use	Extension	Non-Extension	Total
For own information	107	87	194
In newsletter(s)	69	13	82
In newspaper stories or columns	53	2	55
On radio show	63	4	67
On TV show	2		2
In informal talking with others (in person or on the phone)	95	67	162
In formal talks before groups	35	17	52
Totals	424	190	614

Greatest use of information from Insect Alerts is for informing the recipient, and his use in informal contacts with other people. At the same time, the material is being "rediffused" by these receivers potentially to many, many more users via newsletters, newspaper stories and columns, radio shows, and appearances before groups.

So the impact of Insect Alerts is clearly not confined to those persons who receive it directly.

Extension workers also reported using the information in mailings to "over 500 lawn and garden centers," in "Pest of the Week" cards they regularly send to their own local mailing lists, and in their contacts with agri-business personnel in the insect control field.

Commercial people reported using the information to anticipate what chemicals and other control measures their clientele might need and when, and so be sure needed supplies and equipment would be on hand. They diffused appropriate information from Insect Alerts to other members of their own organizations. They also helped diffuse the pertinent information to growers and others who might be affected by the insect situation.

OPINION OF PUBLICATION

In general, what is your opinion of Insect Alerts?

Extension	Helpful	76	29	6			Not helpful
Non-Extension							
	Subtotals	73/149	17/46	2/8			203
Extension	Interesting	65	30	13			Not interesting
Non-Extension							
	Subtotals	59/124	24/54	3/16	3/3		197
Extension	Timely	74	29	7			Not timely
Non-Extension							
	Subtotals	60/134	13/42	15/22	2/2		200

These users of Insect Alerts on the whole see it as a helpful and timely publication. While they see it somewhat less interesting, still the interest level is high.

The comments respondents wrote in after this question also reflected these feelings about the publication. One enthusiast reported, "Could not get along without them!"

Extension workers made some specific suggestions for adding

to the content of Insect Alerts:

Include control information more. (Several mentioned this.)
Include insect identification material--even pictures occasionally.
Keep it short!
Include life cycle information.
Give more information for home owners, lakefront owners, small farmers, and gardeners. Lawn and tree insects.

Commercial workers supported the desire for making specific control recommendations. There were more comments from them about the publication not being timely for them--these came particularly from people outside of Michigan, principally from Ohio where the insect problems usually appear earlier in the season than they do in Michigan. Of course Insect Alerts isn t intended for that out-of-state audience.

MONTHLY PUBLICATION POSSIBILITIES

Insect Alerts has been published weekly for 26 weeks during the active insect time of the year. But there are many other topics related to insect control that could be covered in addition to what is carried now.

We asked this question to get some idea whether or not readers would like to receive other kinds of information during the more slack insect control seasons. The table below shows a high desire for such supplemental information.

Would you favor Insect Alerts being published monthly during the winter to keep you up to date on pesticide information and changes in legislation in the insect control field?

	Yes	No	Totals
Extension	106	4	110
Non-Extension	87	2	89
Totals	193	6	199

Some few respondents wanted the letter to remain as it is. A few others said they'd like to see the publication published monthly during the winter, and would think almost any news or facts in the insect control field would be helpful.

Many others had specific recommendations for content during the winter months:

New pesticide registrations, or cancellations.
Pathological information as well, e.g. incidence of scab, blight, etc.
Last year's insect problems.
Reprints of direct E.P.A. rulings.
New products receive label clearances during the year, these could be mentioned...likewise...products withdrawn... new developments...in (e.g.) integrated or biological control.
An up-to-date account of all new label registrations of all herbicides and insecticides.
Perhaps, life cycles, etc., of important insects.
New instructional materials which become available, publications, bulletins, etc.
New label clearance.
General pesticide regulation effects on the industry and, in particular, effects of this regulation on control of specific insect pests.
Product performance, good or bad.
Yearly highlights, e.g., new pests, increased pests' activity, decreased pest activity, shifts in pest problems, control problems, and reasons for these, also predictions for the coming year.
Things about the insects themselves, summaries, comparisons to other years' temperatures, rainfalls, etc.
Would like to see more "control" data of new pesticides being tested by MSU.
Over-wintering of insects and mite populations.
Feature some of the more important insects in Michigan, giving detailed information on life cycles, damage, etc.
Forecast of probable insect populations for the coming year.
All pesticides.
Label changes, and new registrations.
Pesticide legislation and its effects on the industry.
Reading material such as up to date new reference books published and home study courses available on insect identification and pest control operation.

Herbicides and fungicides.
Possible changes in label recommendations.
How about special articles by guest writers on specific pests pertinent to Michigan or which may become serious pests.
Notice of hearings scheduled for pesticide registration deletions.
Publishing lists of meetings, tours, etc., is of great value.
Interesting approaches, results, problems from other states which might have a bearing on how we approach our insect control here.
When we have certain insect outbreaks such as Alfalfa Leaf Hopper, Insect Alerts could be more helpful if it carries more depth relative to control measure and economics of control and assistance on judging feasibility of treatment. Needed at time of anticipated problem.
Continuation of the color identification sheets we have been given in the past.
Possibly more on plant symptoms for particularly destructive insects.
Substitution of insecticides.
Grain storage insects. Household pests.
Much field research is summarized during the winter and results could be announced in the Alert.
Maybe by areas like here's what happened in N. Michigan last year and here's what we can expect--I guess a recap and forecast type thing.
Compatibility charts. Complete index yard by yard.
Pesticide safety facts--Biological control information--Material we can use in speaking before groups on pesticide use.
How about expanding this Alert to cover diseases and weed problems similar to Illinois letters.
A series on what has been accomplished in Bill Thompson's 1200 acre survey.

Even if it isn't published all year 'round, would you like to see Insect Alerts carry a wider range of information?

	Yes	No	Totals
Extension	41	60	101
Non-Extension	69	13	82
Total	110	73	183

The response to this question was much less favorable to change. Evidently if there are going to be only 26 issues of Insect Alerts, and they are to come during the active insect season, then many readers would prefer that the publication concentrate on it's original task and not add anything else. At the same time, it is clear that this audience is open to receiving further information support in the whole area of insect control. They just don't want to have Insect Alerts subverted from the job it is doing very well right now.

DISTRIBUTION PATTERN

A final question was directed to the Extension workers alone. One concern that we have for Insect Alerts is that it strengthen the educational efforts of the Extension workers and do nothing to diminish these. Therefore we told them the groupings of people to whom Insect Alerts is being sent besides themselves.

These included (1) pesticide industry field representatives, (2) Michigan Department of Agriculture personnel, (3) selected USDA staff based in Michigan, (4) ASCS offices, (5) a few large growers (with agent approval), (6) and some MSU faculty.

(Extension staff only) Is the current distribution pattern and timing of Insect Alerts to other persons satisfactory?

Yes	102
No	2
Total	104

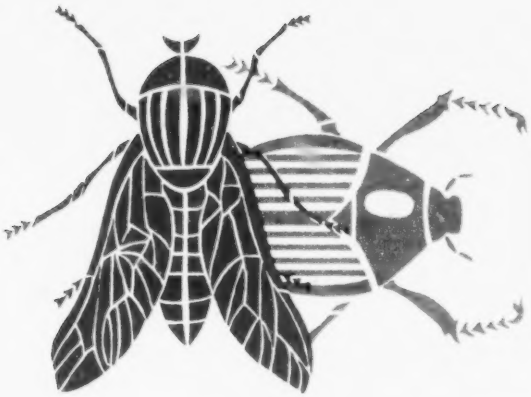
Apparently the current system of distribution outside Extension works from the viewpoint of the Extension workers. Several asked questions about the publication being sent to these people a day later than to the agent--a procedure followed so that the agent is not caught unaware of what the latest information is--while several others commented that the delay was a good idea. Several commented that they did not think the ASCS offices made use of the information. Several asked to see the mailing list for their county, and indicated they'd like the opportunity to add and subtract names from the list.

There also were suggestions of adding selected garden centers and licensed applicators to the regular mailing list. One agent suggested that people on the mailing list be solicited for articles for Insect Alerts.

CONCLUSION

Insect Alerts is very favorably received. It performs a service seen as vital and useful to these readers. And they don't want that function tampered with. Even though they would like information on a wide variety of insect-related topics besides what now appears in Insect Alerts, they don't want that information at the expense of the speed or directness of the present publication.

It does seem there is a place for a monthly publication during the slack winter months to cover some of the other aspects of insect control not currently covered.



INSECT ALERTS

Information on insect biology, abundance, activity, and interpretation of control need.

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INSECT ALERTS USE SURVEY

We need to ask you for some information that will help us do a better job of serving you through the Insect Alerts. We'll really appreciate your taking a few minutes to fill out this short questionnaire. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for you to send it back to us. Thanks for your help.

Your name_____ Date _____

Your position_____

Your mailing address:

1. In general, how do you use the Insect Alerts information when you get it? (check all appropriate items)

___for your own information
___in your newsletter(s)
___in your newspaper stories or columns
___on your radio show
___on a tv show you are on
___in informal talking with others (in person or on the phone)
___in formal talks before groups
___other (please explain)_____

2. In general, what is your opinion of the Insect Alerts? (check each scale below as appropriate):

Helpful _____ Not helpful

Interesting _____ Not interesting

Timely _____ Not timely

Do you have any other comments about the Insect Alerts?

(over)

3. We are thinking of publishing Insect Alerts monthly during the winter to keep you up to date on pesticide information and changes in legislation in the insect control field.

Would you favor our doing this? ___Yes ___No

If you favor it, what other topics would you like to see covered?

Even if it isn't published all year 'round, would you like to see the Insect Alerts carry a wider range of information--such as field day announcements and the like--during its regular publishing season?

___Yes ___No

4. EXTENSION STAFF ONLY ANSWER THE BELOW:

Besides Extension field staff, Insect Alerts go a day later to: (1) pesticide industry field representatives, (2) Michigan Department of Agriculture personnel, (3) selected USDA staff based in Michigan, (4) ASCS offices, (5) a few large growers (with agent approval), and (6) some MSU faculty.

Is such distribution all right wit. you? ___Yes ___No

Comments?:

Thank you for your help. Please use the enclosed envelope to return this to us.

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